

River of No Return by botanicapoetica

Series: [Call & Respond \[10\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Depression, Gen, Hurt/Comfort, Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Attempt

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Eleven, Billy Hargrove & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

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Summary:

A look at the three weeks Billy was out of school and in the cabin.

1. Week One

Author's Note:

If you have a hard time with suicidal ideations please skip this one. Be kind to yourself.

The ride back from the hospital was dead silent, and Hopper had a hard time keeping his eyes on the road instead of the kid slumped in the seat next to him. Billy's face looked like it had gone through a mandoline, and his eyes were empty. A fine tremor was running through the boy but otherwise it was hard to tell where his head was at, though Hopper had ideas. Steve had gone off running, Hopper yelling down the hall after him. He'd come back into the hospital room to some false, pliant version of the Billy Hargrove he'd dragged kicking and screaming on more than one occasion.

Getting Billy in and out of the car was easy, just about the easiest thing to happen that day. Hopper guided Billy inside with a hand on his shoulder, sparing El a kind smile and a wave on his way into the bathroom. Eleven's eyes trailed them from the couch but she said nothing at all.

"You can clean up in here, go ahead and run yourself a bath. Be careful of the stitches though, doc said we need to leave them alone for a few days. I'll be out there if you need anything." Hopper said, Billy not meeting his eyes for one second during his instructions. He stood by the door for a minute uselessly before shutting it behind him. The kid deserved at least a few minutes of privacy after all of this.

After a minute or two of silence Hopper heard the water running and sighed, walking to the couch to sit next to El. He ruffled her hair with one hand, running the other down his own face tiredly. They sat there for minutes that seemed to stretch on forever until he felt El's head stiffen under his touch. He opened his eyes to look at her, their gazes meeting at the same time that the sound of overflowing water reached Hopper's ears.

He was at the bathroom door in seconds, wrenching it open to a

picture that would stay in his head for years later. Water was flowing steadily over the rim of the tub and on to the tile, the faucet on full blast, and Billy. He was under the water completely, his body limp and passive, all of his clothes still on. Hopper slipped on the water, scrambling to turn the faucet off and grab fistfuls of Billy's soaking wet shirt. Hopper hauled him out and he was immediately gasping and sputtering so it must've only been for a minute but it didn't fucking matter. His head was full of smoke, he could see himself pulling Billy into his lap, the word "NO" coming out of him in a loud yell over and over like he could take back the last few minutes. The last twelve years. Steve had said twelve.

He could hear El's quick footsteps and pushed the door closed. "No, kid. Stay away. Stay away, El." He barked, his voice shaking. She couldn't fucking see this, he barely could. He looked back down at Billy who was, thank fucking god, breathing just fine and no longer coughing. His hair was plastered to his face like pin curls, his stitches angry and sticking to his skin. "I'm right here, Billy. I'm not going anywhere." Billy didn't look convinced, his face stricken, his big eyes staring up at Hopper like he'd never seen him before.

He righted Billy the best he could, peeling his heavy and wet clothing off and piling towels on top of him. Hopper looked at the jumble of soaked clothes on the ground and realized Billy had nothing of his own here, not even clothes. A knock at the door and the cautious creak of it opening had Hopper whip his head in its direction, taking in Eleven, her arms full of Hopper's clothing and a few more towels. Hopper watched her lay the towels out to soak up the water on the floor, let her get closer to help him put a dark henley over Billy's lolling head and limp arms.

El turned around while Hopper slipped boxers and socks on to Billy and said nothing still as they bracketed him in a slow walk to the couch. Hopper took in the blankets and pillows ready on the couch, touched her cheek in thanks as they laid the boy down and bundled him up. Something about the softness of it all must've hit Billy because he was shuddering under the blanket, the word "Steve" leaving his mouth in a long wail that kickstarted full blown sobbing. His hands itched and he couldn't ignore it, squeezing on to the couch and lifting the blankets and Billy up into his arms. Eleven came up on

the other side, her little arms closing around Billy in a fierce grip, and they sat together until Billy exhausted himself into fitful sleep.

The next morning Hopper woke up with nothing but a pile of blankets in his arms and a crick in his neck. He shot up instantly, adrenaline making him immediately awake, and his eyes scanned the house, finally falling on the kitchen table. Eleven and Billy were sitting on opposite sides, El's face fixed with that intense determination she usually reserved for supernatural feats. She was pushing a plate of eggos slowly closer to Billy's side of the table, her eyes narrowed.

"Eat."

Billy didn't respond, that glassy look in his eyes as he stared back at her, lips firmly shut. El saw Hopper and looked helplessly at him in a way that had him planting himself in the chair between him. "Eat!" El said again, more urgently this time, pushing the plate until it bumped into Billy's stomach. Still nothing. Hopper looked between them and heaved a sigh, picking up the fork to gather a bite. His stomach dropped out, throat stinging with acid, when the fork got closer and Billy's mouth inched open a little. He watched him chew painfully slow, the expression on his face not moving a bit.

When the plate was clean and he heard El say "More.", Hopper felt like he'd run a fucking marathon with barbells tied to his fucking legs. This wasn't right, he shouldn't have to hand feed a fucking seventeen year old kid. No seventeen year old kid should be so fucked up and curled up so far back into their head that they couldn't eat on their own. He stopped his train of thought to tell El he couldn't just eat junk when he saw her at the stove, dumping a can of soup into a pot purposefully.

Hopper let El take the plate and fork away from him and came back with a bowl and a spoon. He resigned himself before El's hands were pushing him out of his seat and waving him away. He watched her turn her attention back to Billy, a kind smile on her face and a full spoon in her hand.

"More." El said encouragingly, and Billy let her take over until he was suddenly leaning back from the table, some kind of awareness

flashing over his eyes for a moment. Tears were dripping down his face in an instant, his face crumpling and his shoulders slumping him into a doubled over position.

“Sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.” He was saying, his voice desperate and scared. Hopper watched El put the bowl aside to rub his hair, shaking her head and helping him back to the couch. Hopper helped her tuck him back in and, seeing he wasn’t going to move again any time soon, walked over to the phone.

He needed to call Joyce.

2. Week Two

Summary for the Chapter:

Enter Joyce.

Hopper watched from his chair as El recited every line from the beginning of River of No Return, Billy's head on her lap. The movie played constantly on the oldies channel and she'd taken to watching it over and over again which meant Billy had also seen it a dozen times. They were mouthing the dialogue from their spot on the couch, first El and then Billy.

"Who knows? Who cares?"

"The man could get mad, say I did something."

"Did you?"

"I told you, honey. I got lucky, that's all. Just lucky. Now, look. We gotta get outta here."

A knock on the door let him know Joyce was finally here. She was going to know what to do. He was on his feet and to the door a little quicker than he'd like to admit, taking in the sight of her, arms filled with tupperware, with palpable relief. She was craning her neck, her eyes landing on Billy and El, who were still mouthing lines.

"What'll we do if they come with paint on?"

"We'll fight 'em. We cleared this land.

It's ours, so we're gonna stay on it,
or under it. Come on."

"You're not afraid of anything, are you?"

"Not with you."

A shadow seemed to pass over Joyce's face and Hopper realized this was the first time she was seeing Billy since everything had happened. Hopper watched her take in the new angry scar digging

into his skin, the subdued look in his eyes, the rain cloud that seemed to hang over him now. Joyce jerked her head toward the door and Hopper followed, walking with her to her car.

“Oh Hop...” Joyce said, in a way that only she could, filled with a thousand sentiments, her hand coming to rest on his arm before she was unpacking food from the car and handing it over. Hopper didn’t know what to say. He’d had so many things on his mind, so many questions he’d hoped Joyce could answer. They’d all gotten away from him when he’d seen the look on her face.

He took the food into the kitchen while Joyce greeted Billy, watched her sit next to him and give him one of those bone crushing hugs before turning back to the fridge. Billy could do with a Joyce hug, could do with a lot of shit.

“Where’d your earring go, huh?” Hopper heard Joyce say from the living room, and a lightbulb went off in his head. He walked back in to see Joyce pushing Billy’s hair back from his ear, a light frown on her face. He tucked into the bag of clothes he’d maybe broken into the Hargrove house last week to acquire, fishing until his fingers closed around metal. Upon seeing it, Joyce snatched it from his hand and put it in Billy’s ear with a smile.

“There! Handsome as always.” Joyce said, and Hopper knew it was the wrong thing to say. Billy’s hand came up to his ear, drifting to his face, running along the new mark there. His eyes were sharp, then, sharper than Hopper had seen them since they’d been wrestling on the gravel at the quarry. Hopper watched as, in a split second, Billy started yanking on the earring, Joyce grabbing at his hand instantly.

“Honey, honey, stop it. Stop it, I’ve got it.” Joyce said in a rush, pulling the earring out, regret painting her features. Hopper couldn’t do anything, couldn’t help at all, just watched Billy fully absorb how different everything was. He knew there was no stopping it, remembered the same moment happening for himself. Irreversible trauma was a hard pill to swallow, and no one should have to face it at Billy’s age. At El’s age. At anyone’s age.

El had been quiet the whole time, was good at letting things unfold in front of her, but this seemed to be a line for her. Hopper watched her

reach for Billy, slowly lowering his head back into her lap and pointing to the TV. "It's the good part." was all she said, and he watched as Joyce settled in on the other side of Billy, draping her arm over his back. Hopper squeezed in next to her and they all sat in silence, watching Marilyn Monroe in her glamorous wilderness gear. Watched her traverse a raging, horrible river with determination.

The next morning Hopper entered the kitchen to get coffee, walking past a scene that was extremely familiar to him from the past week or so. El and Joyce were sitting at the table with Billy, El pushing a plate toward Billy for a few long minutes with no response. She heaved a sigh of resignation and reached for the fork, only to have Joyce take it instead. Hopper leaned against the kitchen counter and sipped his coffee, watching Joyce close Billy's fingers around it, placing hers on top.

"You have to do it, Billy. We're here, but you have to do it."